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COLONEL CARRINGTON'S OFFICIAL REPORT  
OF THE  
PHIL KEARNEY MASSACRE.

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HEADQUARTERS POST, FORT PHILIP KEARNEY,  
DACOTAH TERRITORY, January 3d, 1867.

*Assistant Adjutant-General, Department of the Platte, Omaha,  
Nebraska Territory.*

I respectfully state the facts of fight with Indians on the 21st ultimo. This disaster had the effect to confirm my judgment as to the hostility of Indians, and solemnly declares, by its roll of dead and the numbers engaged, that my declarations, from my arrival at Laramie in June, were not idle conjecture, but true.

It also declares that in Indian warfare there must be perfect coolness, steadiness, and judgment. This contest is in their best and almost their last hunting-grounds. They cannot be whipped or punished by some little dash after a hand-ful, nor by mere resistance of offensive movements. They must be subjected, and made to respect and fear the whites.

It also declares with equal plainness that my letter from Fort Laramie, as to the absolute failure of the treaty, so far as related to my command, was true.

It also vindicates every report from my pen, and every measure I have taken to secure defensive and tenable posts on this line.

It vindicates my administration of the Mountain District,



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Department of the Platte, and asserts that the confidence reposed in me by Lieutenant-General Sherman has been fully met.

It vindicates my application so often made, for reinforcements, and demonstrates the fact that if I had received those assured to me, by telegram and letter, I could have kept up communications, and opened a safe route for emigrants next spring.

It proves correct my report of fifteen hundred lodges of hostile Indians on Tongue River, not many hours' ride from this post.

It no less declares that while there has been partial success in impromptu dashes, the Indian, now desperate and bitter, looks upon the rash white man as a sure victim, no less than he does a coward, and that the United States must come to the deliberate resolve to send an army equal to a fight with the Indians of the Northwest.

Better to have the expense, at once, than to have a lingering, provoking war for years. It must be met, and the time is just now.

I respectfully refer to my official reports and correspondence from Department Headquarters for verification of the foregoing propositions, and proceed to the details of Fetterman's Massacre.

On the morning of the 21st ultimo, at about eleven o'clock, my picket on Pilot Hill reported the wood-train corralled and threatened by Indians on Sullivant Hills, about a mile and a half from the fort.

A few shots were heard. Indians also appeared in the brush at the crossing of Peney by the Virginia City road.

Upon tendering to Brevet Major Powell the command of Company C, U. S. Cavalry, then without an officer, but which he had been drilling, Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman claimed by rank to go out. I acquiesced, giving him the men of his own company that were for duty, and a portion of Company C, 2d Battalion, 18th U. S. Infantry. Lieute-

nant G. W. Grummond, who had commanded the mounted Infantry, requested to take out the Cavalry. He did so.

In the previous skirmish, Lieutenant Grummond was barely saved from the disaster that befell Lieutenant Bingham by timely aid. (See page 196 of "Absaraka.")

Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman also was well admonished, as well as myself, that we were fighting brave and desperate enemies, who had sought to make up, by cunning and deceit, all the advantage which the white man gains by intelligence and better arms.

My instructions were therefore peremptory and explicit. I knew the ambition of each to win honor, but being unprepared for large aggressive action through want of adequate force, now fully demonstrated, I looked to continuance of timber supplies, to prepare for more troops, as the one practical duty; hence, two days before, Major Powell, sent out to cover the train under similar circumstances, simply did that duty, when he could have had a fight to any extent.

The day before, viz., the 20th ultimo, I went myself to the pinery, and built a bridge of forty-five feet span, to expedite the passage of wagons from the woods into open ground. Hence my instructions to Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman, viz.: "Support the wood-train, relieve it, and report to me. Do not engage or pursue Indians at its expense; under no circumstances pursue over the Ridge, viz.: Lodge trail Ridge, as per map in your possession." (For map, see page 204, "Absaraka.")

To Lieutenant Grummond I gave orders to "report to Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman, implicitly obey orders, and not leave him."

Before the command left, I instructed Lieutenant A. H. Wands, my Regimental Quartermaster and acting Adjutant, to repeat these orders. He did so.

Fearing still that the spirit of ambition might over-ride prudence, as my refusal to permit sixty mounted men and forty citizens to go for several days down Tongue River val-

ley after villages had been unfavorably regarded by Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman and Captain Brown, I crossed the parade, and from a sentry platform halted the Cavalry, and again repeated my precise orders. I knew that the Indians had, for some days, returned each time with increased numbers, to feel our strength and decoy detachments to their sacrifice, and believed that to foil their purpose was actual victory, until reinforcements should arrive and my preparations were complete. I was right.

Just as the command left, five Indians reappeared at the crossing. The glass revealed others in the thicket, having the apparent object of determining the watchfulness of the garrison, or cutting off any small party that should move out. A case shot dismounted one and developed nearly thirty, who broke for the hills and ravines to the North.

In half an hour the picket reported that the wood-train had broken corral and moved on to the pinery. No report came from the detachment. It was composed of eighty-one, officers and men, including two citizens, all well armed; the Cavalry having the new carbine, while the detachment of Infantry was of choice men, the pride of their companies.

At twelve o'clock firing was heard toward Peno Creek, beyond Lodge Trail Ridge. A few shots were followed by constant shots, not to be counted. Captain Ten Eyck was immediately dispatched with Infantry, and the remaining Cavalry, and two wagons, and orders to join Colonel Fetterman at all hazards. The men moved promptly and on the run, but within little more than half an hour from the first shot, and just as the supporting party reached the hill overlooking the scene of action, all firing ceased.

Captain Ten Eyck sent a mounted orderly back with the report, that he could see or hear nothing of Fetterman, but that a body of Indians on the road below him were challenging him to come down, while larger bodies were in all the valleys for several miles around. Moving cautiously forward with the wagons (evidently supposed by the enemy to be

guns, as mounted men were in advance), he rescued from the spot where the enemy had been nearest, forty-nine bodies, including those of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Fetterman and Captain F. H. Brown. The latter went out without my consent or knowledge, fearless to fight Indians with any adverse odds, and determined to kill one at least before joining his Company.

Captain Ten Eyck fell back slowly, followed, but not pressed by the enemy, reaching the Post without loss. The following day, finding general doubt as to the success of an attempt to recover other bodies, but believing that failure to rescue them would dishearten the command and encourage the Indians, who are so particular in this regard, I took eighty men and went to the scene of action, leaving a picket to advise me of any movement in the rear, and to keep signal communication with the garrison.

The scene of action told its own story.

The road on the little ridge where the final stand took place, was strewn with arrows, arrow-heads, scalp-poles, and broken shafts of spears. The arrows that were spent harmlessly, from all directions, show that the command was suddenly overwhelmed, surrounded, and cut off while in retreat. Not an officer or man survived! A few bodies were found at the north end of the divide over which the road runs, just beyond Lodge Trail Ridge.

Nearly all were heaped near four rocks, at the point nearest the Fort, these rocks, enclosing a space about six feet square, having been the last refuge for defence. Here were also a few unexpended rounds of Spencer cartridge.

Fetterman and Brown had each a revolver-shot in the left temple. As Brown always declared that he would reserve a shot for himself, as a last resort, so I am convinced that these two brave men fell, each by the other's hand, rather than undergo the slow torture inflicted upon others.

Lieutenant Grummond's body was on the road between the two extremes, with a few others. This was not far from

five miles from the fort, and nearly as far from the wood-train. Neither its own guard nor the detachment could by any possibility have helped each other, and the train was incidentally saved by the fierceness of the fight, in the brave but rash impulse of pursuit.

The officers, who fell, believed that no Indian force could overwhelm that number of troops, well held in hand.

Their terrible massacre bore marks of great valor, and has demonstrated the force and character of the foe; but no valor could have saved them.

Pools of blood on the road and sloping sides of the narrow divide showed where Indians bled fatally; but their bodies were carried off. I counted sixty-five such pools in the space of an acre, and three, within ten feet of Lieutenant Grummond's body. Eleven American horses and nine Indian ponies were on the road, or near the line of bodies; others, crippled, were in the valleys.

At the northwest or farther point, between two rocks, and apparently where the command first fell back from the valley, realizing their danger, I found citizens James S. Wheatley and Isaac Fisher, of Blue Springs, Nebraska, who, with "Henry Rifles," felt invincible, but fell, one having one hundred and five arrows in his naked body. The widow and family of Wheatley are here.

The cartridge shells about them told how well they fought. Before closing this report, I wish to say that every man, officer, soldier, or citizen who fell received burial, with such record as to identify each.

Fetterman, Brown, and Grummond lie in one grave; the remainder also share one tomb, buried, as they fought, together; but the cases in which they were laid are duly placed and numbered.

I ask the General Commanding to give my report, in the absence of the Division Commander, an access to the eye and ear of the General-in-Chief. The Department Commander must have more troops; and I declare this, my judgment,

solemnly, and for the general public good, without one spark of personal ambition other than to do my duty daily as it comes; and whether I seem to speak too plainly or not, ever with the purpose to declare the whole truth, and with proper respect to my superior officers, who are entitled to the facts, as to scenes remote from their own immediate notice. I was asked to "*send all the bad news.*" I do it, so far, as far as I can.

I give some of the facts as to my men, whose bodies I found just at dark, resolved to bring all in, viz.:

*Mutilations.*

Eyes torn out and laid on the rocks.

Noses cut off.

Ears cut off.

Chins hewn off.

Teeth chopped out.

Joints of fingers cut off.

Brains taken out and placed on rocks, with members of the body.

Entrails taken out and exposed.

Hands cut off.

Feet cut off.

Arms taken out from socket.

Private parts severed, and indecently placed on the person.

Eyes, ears, mouth, and arms penetrated with spear-heads, sticks, and arrows.

Ribs slashed to separation, with knives; skulls severed in every form, from chin to crown.

Muscles of calves, thighs, stomach, breast, back, arms, and cheek taken out.

Punctures upon every sensitive part of the body, even to the soles of the feet and palms of the hand.

All this does not approximate the whole truth. Every Medical Officer was faithful, aided by a large force of men, and all were not buried until Wednesday after the fight.

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The great real fact is, that these Indians take alive when possible, and slowly torture. It is the opinion of Dr. S. M. Horton, Post Surgeon, that not more than six were killed by balls. Of course the whole arrows, hundreds of which were removed from naked bodies, were all used after the removal of the clothing.

I have said enough. It is a hard but absolute duty. In the establishment of this post, I designed to put it where it fell heaviest upon the Indians, and therefore the better for the emigrants. My duty will be done when I leave, as ordered, for my new Regimental Headquarters, Fort Casper. I submit herewith list of casualties, marked A.

I shall also, as soon as practicable, make full report, for the year 1866, of operations in the establishment of this new line.

I am, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,  
(Signed) HENRY B. CARRINGTON,  
Colonel 18th U. S. Infantry,  
*Commanding Post.*

The following note was sent to Captain Ten Eyck, in answer to message of his courier that he could see nothing of Fetterman.

FORT PHIL KEARNEY, DACOTAH TERRITORY,  
December 21st, 1866.

CAPTAIN T. TEN EYCK.

Forty well-armed men, with three thousand rounds, ambulances, etc., left before your courier came in. You must unite with Fetterman. Fire slowly, and keep men in hand. You would have saved two miles toward the scene of action if you had taken Lodge Trail Ridge. I order the wood-train in, which will give fifty men to spare.

(Signed) HENRY B. CARRINGTON,  
*Colonel Commanding.*